

Life History of Diane Gunderson, OTR/L

Parker Hoey, MOTS and Cheyenne Hanson, MOTS

Introduction

- This life history is one of 31 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*.
- The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information.
- This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

Description of Participant

- Since graduating from the University of North Dakota in 1973, Diane Gunderson has been a practicing therapist within the Grand Forks, ND area for the past 44 years. She began her work in the psychosocial field of practice, eventually becoming a certified Psychodramatist.
- Diane went on to advance to multiple management positions throughout her career.

Positions

- Director of Psychiatric Occupational Therapy, United Hospital
- Director of Therapeutic Recreation Services, United Hospital
- Manager of Child Life Specialists, United Hospital
- Director of Physical Restorative Occupational Therapy Department and Hand Therapy Center, United Hospital
- Conflict Resolution Manager, Altru Hospital
- Co-Owner of Team Builders Associates (private practice)
- Director of Therapy Services, Altru Hospital
- Director of Specialty Clinics, Altru Hospital
- Director of Physical Medicine, Altru Hospital

Philanthropy

- Diane played a role in starting the Altru Autism Screening Clinic which is a free clinic funded by grants dedicated to the early detection of Autism in children.
- She assisted in the founding and is the current chairperson of the Spin for Kids Organization which provides funding for therapy and adaptive equipment of children in need with disabilities in the local area.

Literature Review

1960s-70s: The Women's Health Movement was advancing with the mission of health care as a human right for all, regardless of gender. Diane began practicing during this era and experienced these difficulties while pursuing her first job as a pregnant woman.

1980s: The North Dakota State Board of OT practice was established. This was after Diane had already been practicing for 10 years.

2015: AOTA's Salary & Workforce Survey identified a wage gap between male and female OT practitioners with women making 13 cents less. A suggested solution was for more women to enter management positions. Diane has been serving in management roles throughout her career and has encouraged others to do the same.

2016: The Mental Health Reform Act passed making occupational therapy higher education programs eligible to receive training grants related to mental and behavioral health. Diane emphasized the importance of her education in mental health leading to success with clients in all settings.

Methodology

- This study was a qualitative, life history approach.
- The participant was assigned from a list developed by the project directors through purposive sampling.
- There were no specific gatekeeper issues as the initial contact was made by the project directors.
- Informed consent was given.
- There was one interview which was audio recorded and lasted approximately an hour and a half in length.
- The interview took place at the participant's home.
- Interview questions were based off of a semi-structured interview schedule developed by the project directors. This interview schedule was used with all participants. The student researchers modified or added questions into the interview schedule as needed.
- The data collected from the interview was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the two student researchers and approved by the project directors.
- This data was checked over by the participant.

Data Analysis

- Throughout this process, the Kawa Model was used a theoretical basis.
 - Specifically, it allowed researchers to view the participant's life history as a river with all the parts interconnected to identify life obstacles, facilitating factors, and environmental components (Wada, 2011).
- The transcription was coded into 14 codes which were then collapsed into 4 categories and accompanying themes that are listed below.
- Quotes were identified to support these themes with a final assertion created.

Exceeding Job Expectations

- Diane placed a strong value on professional development and continuing education.
- Every individual has the power to make a change in their professional field, if they have the courage to start.

"...sometimes you just have to start doing something to figure it out. And if you think you have to figure out before, you never get started."

Expanding the Role of Occupational Therapists

- Promoting management to OTs and embracing technology is crucial to advancement of the field.
- A strength OTs have in management roles is being able to break down processes and see individual strengths within the team.

"...being an occupational therapist, when you are on another committee you bring a whole different perspective that I don't believe anybody else in the room has."

Personal Context

- Her passion for her career comes from her "addiction to people".
- The time in which she began practicing lead her to develop a strong work ethic and respect for diversity.

"And so I knew at that time that if I had said, yes, I was pregnant that I probably was not going to get the job. And, so I put down no. Even though I was. And my thought was if I can just get in the door and let them see my work ethic and what an occupational therapist can do...that it would be okay, and it was."

Personal Leadership Style

- Her personal leadership style focuses on building leaders within the team, accepting open feedback, and promoting fairness.
- Her background in Psychodrama combined with therapeutic use of self increased her ability to connect with clients and colleagues.

"I want occupational therapists that have that compassion. That don't have that judgmentalness to how somebody is looking."



Diane Gunderson holding a sweatshirt with every name tag she has earned through her various positions in her career.

Conclusion

- **Final Assertion:** Diane Gunderson has exemplified the values of occupational therapy through expanding the scope of practice in her roles as a manager and leader throughout her career.
- Her leadership style promoted connectivity among team members, therapeutic use of self, and an understanding of team and individual needs.
- Throughout her career, she has expanded the scope of OT in North Dakota into management positions within hospitals and philanthropic organizations.
- This expansion was accomplished through her willingness to embrace change and to continuously learn in order to better herself personally and professionally.

References

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